



## What is PFAS?

PFAS is a group of manufactured chemicals with unique properties that are able to repel oil, grease and water. Because of these properties they are found in a variety of commercial and house-hold products, including carpets, water-proof clothing, non-stick cookware, etc. PFAS are known to be persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic. Due to their persistence in the environment and moderate solubility, they can be transported long distances - potentially kilometers - in the air and water, as well as transferred between different media including soil, sediment, surface water and groundwater.

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## PFAS for Councils

Per and poly-fluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS) are an emerging contaminant of concern in Australia and internationally. PFAS are not only found in fire fighting foams (AFFF) but are also found in a wide range of products used by consumers and industry and are therefore being increasingly identified in the environment, in particular from sources such as sewage treatment plants (STPs), waste water treatment plants (WWTPs) and landfills. Their complex and unique properties make them a particular challenge for environmental practitioners and regulators. This, combined with their high media profile and lack of specific PFAS regulatory guidance, makes the assessment and regulation of PFAS impacted sites a complicated issue.

With Councils increasingly faced with the impacts of PFAS contamination in their communities, and with the potential for PFAS contamination to arise on their own land (e.g. Rural Fire Service facilities, STPs and landfills), the Hunter and Central Coast Regional Environment Management Strategy (HCCREMS) recently hosted a PFAS forum for councils, in conjunction with EPA. The forum focussed on the following:

- Understanding and identifying sources of PFAS;
- Fate and transport in the environment;
- Potential human health and environmental effects;
- Specific considerations when assessing PFAS;
- Viable remediation and management methods;
- Progress of strategies, policies, guidelines and management plans for PFAS; and
- Council's roles and responsibilities.

Copies of the presentations from the forum can be found here:  
<http://www.hccrems.com.au/pfas-councils-forum/>.

## The latest PFAS Regulatory Guidance

The PFAS National Environmental Management Plan (NEMP) was finalised in January 2018 by the Heads of EPA (HEPA), and has prepared to guide environmental regulators in their regulation of PFAS contaminated sites, PFAS contaminated materials and, where applicable, PFAS-containing products. As well as providing technical guidance on the assessment, remediation and management of PFAS, the NEMP also sets out guidelines for undertaking

inventories to assist those with management responsibilities for PFAS contamination, and methods for prioritising sites for further investigation.

The COAG "International Agreement on a National Framework for Responding to PFAS Contamination" came into effect on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 2018, and includes a *PFAS Contamination Response Protocol* (Appendix A), which outlines a priority to *Identify sites, investigate and assess risks*.

The NSW auditor guidelines (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2017) also states that "The auditor must check that contamination by per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) has been considered in the assessment of contamination".

This latest guidance highlights the need to actively investigate and prioritise sites that are potentially impacted with PFAS.

## A Northern Rivers PFAS Forum?

Easterly Point Environmental has been thrown head-first into the world PFAS over the past few years, having been involved in a number of privately owned and public (council owned) sites where PFAS is an issue. It is apparent that PFAS is certainly an issue in the Northern Rivers, however, the specific responsibilities of councils as landowners and the ARA, appropriate screening criteria for surface water assessment, and when PFAS should be specifically investigated, are all issues that are not yet clearly understood.

Easterly Point would like to gauge if there is any interest from local Council Officers in putting on a forum similar to that hosted by HCCREMS. It is up to us, as practitioners, regulators and landowners to proactively understand and manage this issue for the future of our community and environment.

Figure source: Arcadis

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*Please contact either Hailey Spry or Marc Salmon to register your interest in contributing/hosting/attending a PFAS forum in the Northern Rivers, or if you would like any further PFAS information.*

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